



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

OSNZ—Birds New Zealand

December 2019

<http://osnz.org.nz/> and <http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/>

Greetings

2019 has been a busy year for Wellington Birds New Zealand (OSNZ), especially with the organising and hosting of the Annual Birds New Zealand Conference and Annual General meeting. In 2020 there will be some major changes in the running of Wellington Birds New Zealand. As mentioned previously, I have resigned as the Wellington Regional Representative as of the 31st of December. A new Regional Representative has not yet been identified. Consequently, there will be a period of some uncertainty but the activities of the Wellington Regional branch will continue. Monthly meetings will to be held on the first Monday of the month but will be managed by a group of experienced ornithologists.

Given that a replacement Regional Representative has not yet been identified there is a need to ensure that at least some of the tasks are taken up by others. Sharing the tasks is required to run the Wellington branch to make the role of the Regional Representative become more manageable. Furthermore, it is my strong recommendation that there should be a fixed term for the Regional Representative of two years.

The tasks include;

- Writing the Wellington Regional Newsletter.
- Writing the Wellington Report for the Birds New Zealand magazine.
- Organising the speakers for the monthly meetings.
- Organising local and national projects.

Would members who can help with the running of the Wellington region please contact me.

Note, that in conjunction with Michael Szabo we are going to have a Cook Strait pelagic trip in April.

Best wishes for 2020,

Geoff de Lisle

Upcoming Monthly Meetings WHERE and WHEN

WHERE and WHEN:

The meeting is held on the first Monday of the month at Te Papa's collections building, 169 Tory Street. Go up the steps and across the parking area to the door.

There will not be a meeting in January, 2020. The first meeting of the year will be on **Monday 3rd of February**. This meeting will be the traditional Member's Meeting, and consist of short ~5-10 minute talks given by members. The only limitation for the talks is that they have an avian connection. **Please contact Geoff de Lisle (osnzwelly@gmail.com) if you would like to present at this meeting.**

Monday 2nd of March. **Kate McInnes** a veterinarian working for the Department of Conservation has been invited to talk at this meeting.

October Meeting, Monday 7th. The Goodnature Trap Story

Robbie van Dam co-founded Goodnature in 2005 after the completion of his degree in Industrial Design at Victoria University, Wellington. With his co-founder Craig Bond, Goodnature has grown from the two of them and a small innovation grant from the Department of Conservation, to nearly 50 staff selling product into 20 countries. As the design leader, Robbie hosts product from inception in the field to the final delivery of the product to the end consumer and all the key touchpoints along the way. Initially, all customer insights came from the remote backcountry of New Zealand but with success, this has transitioned to cities all over the planet and peoples' backyards or homes.

<https://goodnature.co.nz/>

November Meeting, Monday 4th. Museum Photographer, Jean-Claude Stahl. In his role as Museum Photographer, Jean-Claude photographs a very wide range of objects, including birds. His journey in his current position is summarised on Te Papa's Facebook page, November 2019

"What are the most challenging things to photograph? The Huia egg was difficult. There is only one in existence. If you crunch – that is it."

This is the story of Jean-Claude Stahl, our photographer of natural history. He brings our tiniest specimens to life through an arsenal of lenses, and beautifies objects from the collection (some centuries old) in order for scientists and the public to be able to study them.

"Whatever I do is very rarely one photograph, it is all focus stacking. Each photo focuses on a different part of the specimen, then the focus is moved. All of these photos combine to make one image."

Although Jean-Claude always had a love for photography, his 'le voyage' to Aotearoa began as a scientist.

"My studies were in biology. I went to the Subantarctic, the French Islands in the Indian Ocean. We still had military service to complete [in France], and joining a research ship was a civil way to do it. I studied penguins in Crozet. The last time I went to Crozet I saw a guy coming ashore with red hair and a yellow raincoat. That turned out to be Sandy Bartle, curator of birds at Te Papa, who invited me to come to New Zealand to work with him for a year in '86."

"I chased Buller's Albatrosses for several years before that contract ran out, and they recycled me here into photography. I knew about macro-photography from my days photographing orchids in Europe, but it was all in film. I still don't know how I did it back then without digital."

Examples of Jean-Claude's work can be seen in the recently published, "100 Natural History Treasures of Te Papa".

December Meeting, Monday 2nd. Alison Ballance, Kakapo Stories. Alison summarised her long history with kakapo that dates back to the 1990s. Her first encounter with them was during her writing with Gideon Climo "Hoki, the story of a kakapo" (1997). Hoki was born in 1992 and was the first kakapo to be raised in captivity. Unfortunately Hoki was one of the adults which died during the aspergillosis outbreak this year. In 1998 Alison made the Wild South Documentary, "To Save a Kakapo" which is available online. From the 1990s to 2019 the number of kakapo increased from ~50 to 148. Alison published "Kakapo, rescued from the brink of extinction" in 2010 with a 2nd edition released in 2018. The last breeding season (2019) was the most successful breeding season since kakapo have been intensively managed. Numbers of kakapo now total 211 and new areas are required to accommodate the major increase in the population. During the latest breeding season Alison produced a series of blogs, The Kakapo files. The most worrying aspect of the current breeding season was the occurrence of aspergillosis, a fungal disease that resulted in the death of 7 chicks and Hoki and another adult.

Alison Balance (2010, 2018) Kakapo, rescued from the brink of extinction, Craig Potton Publishing

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/kakapo-files> <https://www.nzgeo.com/video/to-save-the-kakapo/>

Cook Strait Pelagic Birding Trip - Saturday 4th of April, 2020.

Please let Geoff de Lisle know (osnzwelly@gmail.com) if you wish to go on this trip.

This is a great opportunity to see a range of different pelagic seabirds, especially albatross and mollymawks. Details of the trip are as follows;

Cook Strait Fishing Charters Ltd operates from Seaview Marina, Port Road in Lower Hutt. Entry to the marina car park is at Gate 2 off Port Road. The vessel 'Seafarer II' is located on Pier D. There is ample parking available close to the pier.

Please ensure you are at the boat 15 minutes prior to the 7am departure time to allow for a safety briefing and prompt departure from the wharf.

Map link: <http://www.cookstraitfishingcharters.co.nz/location>

The trip will be 5-6 hours and he provides snacks, tea/coffee and a barbecue lunch.

People can pay either by cash or EFTpos on the boat. The cost of the charter is \$1800. So if we get 20 people it will be \$90 each but if we are short by one or two then we can split it up evenly across 19 people (\$95 each) or 18 people (\$100 each). We are aiming to have 20 people.

He also asked that we let people know that if they want to do some fishing while we are out in Cook Strait he charges \$30 per person to use one of his fishing rods with all bait provided. Note, this is a birding trip and not a fishing trip. Any fishing will be secondary to birding. Participants must follow the instructions of the skipper.

Health and Safety: This trip is not suitable for people who are susceptible to sea sickness. Participants must follow the instructions of the skipper.

Regional Representative: Position vacant. osnzwelly@gmail.com

Regional Recorder: Peter Hodge, peter.hodgenz@gmail.com

Birds New Zealand Regional Roundup: Position vacant osnzwelly@gmail.com

Wellington Harbour Survey: Geoff de Lisle (04) 527 0929 and Stuart Nicholson

Mist netting – Matu Booth, manager@ngamanu.co.nz Nga Manu, Waikanae

Ross Pickard, ross.pickard@hexagonsi.com Wellington Zoo

Bird Snippets

Wellington City biodiversity

ledzep » Mon Oct 14, 2019

I've heard a number of Eastern Rosellas calling during the weekend from several locations around the Ngaio and Crofton Downs area. The "cooee" call repeated many times quite urgently (only a second or two between calls). Must be breeding season. BirdingNZ.net

Dotterel disaster

boneywhitefoot » Mon Oct 21, 2019

Sadly once again this spring, the tide has washed over the Waikanae spit on the Paraparaumu side destroying all the Dotterel nests including the New Zealand Dotterels second attempt.

One has to wonder if the birds will have to abandon this once wonderful nursery for good, due to its low lying characteristics.

Boney Whitefoot Photography

<https://boneywhitefoot.wordpress.com/>

BirdingNZ.net

Dotterel disaster

Joanna10 » Mon Oct 21, 2019

Yes this is the situation we have to deal with every year at Riversdale Beach. On several occasions we have raised nests to try and get them above high water levels and it has worked, mostly. This technique is taught at the Miranda Shorebird Centre Dotterel management course. May be worth trying at Waikanae? BirdingNZ.net

boneywhitefoot » Mon Oct 21, 2019

How much interference will the birds take?

BirdingNZ.net

Davidthomas » Tue Oct 22, 2019 12:24 pm

They're pretty tolerant from my experiences anyway. I had to save a nest at Whangamata in the Coromandel from a super high tide by digging the eggs out of the wet sand, gathering some new dry soft stuff and placing it down. The bird was usually pretty quick to run back onto the eggs, which happened a couple of times over the course of an hour before we could build up a decent enough mound. But I might have just had a super tolerant pair as it had happened before in that location. Once we did all the renovations etc she took approximately an hour or two before she sat down again. Successfully fledged two babies though. BirdingNZ.net

Fighting little penguins

The largest number of little penguins in Wellington harbour is on Matiu/Somes Island where most of the birds use artificial nest boxes. The penguin population on Matiu/Somes Island is being intensely monitored as part of a project led by Mike Rumble. On the 21st of September a male penguin was found injured in a nest box during one of the fortnightly surveys. The penguin was on its own and had head wounds and an injured flipper. Blood on the walls and roof was evidence of a significant fight. The bird was taken to the Nest, the wildlife hospital at the Wellington Zoo. A thorough examination by the veterinary team at the Nest revealed several wounds on its head and a superficial wound on its right toe. No abnormalities were seen on x-ray. The wounds were examined and cleaned under general anaesthetic. Some feathers were removed during this process. On the 4th of October, the penguin was transferred to the Wildbase Recovery facility,



Massey University in Palmerston North for rehabilitation. The bird was held in the facility until the 26th of October when it was released back onto Mātū/Somes Island. A flipper band, with unique identification, was attached prior to release.

On the 2nd of November the little penguin, named Dexter by his veterinary carers, was found on Mātū/Somes Island once again injured and was returned to the Nest at Wellington Zoo. He had additional wounds to the head and had lost even more feathers. Because feathers are important in waterproofing it was decided to keep the bird until it goes through a moult. Dexter will be held at the Wildbase Recover in Palmerston North until it is ready for release.

Acknowledgements: Mike Rumble for information and photograph, and Baukje Lenting, the Nest, Wellington Zoo.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/402515/little-blue-penguin-in-and-out-of-rehab-on-matiu-island>

Central Energy Trust Wildbase Recovery

This specially designed facility provides shelter and world-class care for native wildlife to rehabilitate after treatment at Massey University's Wildbase hospital and the Nest. The facility is located in the heart of Victoria Esplanade in Palmerston North and is open to visitors. A website lists a summary of current patients, including Dexter and other residents at the facility.

<https://wildbaserecovery.co.nz/visit-the-centre>

Agonistic behaviour in little penguins

Agonistic (fighting) behaviour in little penguins was the subject of the doctoral thesis of Joseph Waas (1988). His studies were principally conducted on two cave dwelling and two burrow nesting populations from Banks Peninsula and Motunau Island. He observed, *"Little blue penguins are highly aggressive, particularly during their nocturnal visits to colonies during the breeding season. Contests for resources (e.g. nest sites and sites used in mate attraction) are frequent and are usually settled without overt aggression. Contests which do escalate to physical combat (c. 1.2% of agonistic interactions involving males), commonly result in serious flesh wounds and eye loss. Given the serious implications of these types of injuries on foraging ability, reproductive success and survival, escalation during contests can be viewed as entailing considerable risks or costs to little blue penguins."*

Wildbase noted, *"During the breeding season it is not uncommon for male penguins to fight over the affection of a female penguin. Most birds have hollow bones in their wings to make them lighter for flight, but penguins don't fly, so their wings contain solid bone. They use their flippers like bats to club each other, delivering up to eight blows per second!"*

Waas, JR. (1988) Agonistic and sexual communication in little blue penguins, *Eudyptula minor*. A thesis in fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Canterbury.

https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/5827/waas_thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Fernbird – Update

In April this year 40 fernbirds were transferred to Mana Island from Lake Rotokare in Southern Taranaki. All birds were colour banded with unique combinations for individuals. Pairs of fernbird set up territories, not only round the release site at the wetlands but also at more distant sites. Unbanded fernbirds have been observed at several sites on the island indicating that the translocated birds have successfully bred.

Fernbirds were translocated to the Pauatahanui Reserve in April 2017 and 2018. These birds have successfully nested and most of the birds in the reserve are now unbanded and locally bred.

Titipounamu (rifleman) chicks hatched at ZEALANDIA

On the 25th of October Greater Wellington Regional Council and Zealandia issued a press release on the hatching of titipounamu (rifleman) in Zealandia. In March this year 60 titipounamu were translocated from the Wainuiomata Mainland Island to Zealandia. The mainland island has an ongoing predator control programme which enables birds such as titipounamu to thrive. Seven nests have been discovered in Zealandia – 2 in artificial nest boxes and 5 in natural nests. Dr Danielle Shanahan, Director of ZEALANDIA's Centre for People and Nature says, *"It's very exciting that we have discovered fledglings and eggs this early in the breeding season. The titipounamu are absolutely making themselves at home in ZEALANDIA."*

Update, 20th December. Kari Beaven reports, "So far so good; 14 nests have been located in the sanctuary (and one just outside), most in natural cavities and a few provided nest boxes." Zealandia website.

<https://www.gw.govt.nz/titipounamu-chicks-hatched-at-zealandia/>

Lake Kohangatera Pied Shag Colony

In January 2017 Pied shags were recorded nesting on low shrubs, *Coprosma propinqua* at the outlet to Lake Kohangatera (Pencarrow). All the other nesting colonies of Pied shags in the Wellington region are in trees. A total of 5 nests were observed. Subsequently the colony has continued to expand. On Boxing Day this year there were 18 nest sites, 16 of which were occupied. At the colony there were 24 birds including chicks near fledging. At least one of the nests contained eggs. The colony has expanded upstream from the original site. Downstream from the colony there was an additional 17 birds.

Picture, taken 26th December, 2019. The colony was originally just by the dead cabbage tree.



The first spring season has now been completed (September to November). Wellington members are to be congratulated for their ongoing participation in the Atlas. For the Atlas the Wellington Region includes the Wairarapa. In the Winter season

532.01 hours were spent on the Atlas and in the Spring season a further 671.922 hours of surveying was carried out. The following table is a summary of the first two seasons of the Atlas.

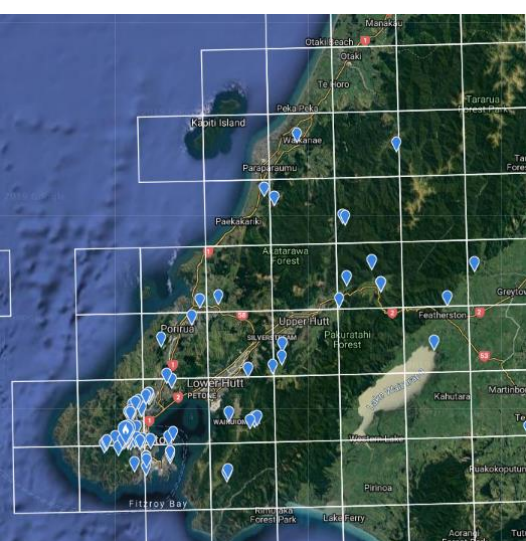
| | Wellington | | | New Zealand | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Winter (July-August) | Spring (September – November) | Total – July to 17/12/2019 | Winter (July to August) | Spring (September – November) | Total – July to 20/9/2019 |
| Checklists | 1630 | 2051 | 3963 | 11,276 | 12954 | 13,394 |
| Participants | 91 | 76 | 128 | 369 | 372 | 394 |
| Species | 94 | 115 | 117 | 169 | 208 | 175 |
| Squares with data | 78 (74.3%) | 78 (74.3%) | 94 (89.5%) | 1348 (41.7%) | 1436 (44.4%) | 1422 (44%) |

The busiest squares continue to be those associated with Wellington city. The following table lists the total Atlas effort June to 20th of December.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>BY66 449 checklists 60 species 153.10 hours</p> | <p>BY67 275 checklists 59 species 62.41 hours</p> |
| <p>BZ66 725 checklists 76 species 238.14 hours</p> | <p>BZ67 527 checklists 72 species 128.72 hours</p> |



These four squares account for 38.4% of all the checklists submitted from the Wellington Region.



As expected, shining cuckoo were not recorded in the Winter survey but they were identified in 30 different squares in the Spring observations (map left). During Spring long-tailed cuckoo were only recorded in three squares. The lower number of long-tailed cuckoos reflects not only their more restrictive distribution but also their later arrival to New Zealand compared to shining cuckoos and their likely distribution in native forest squares which were not surveyed in Spring (map right).



Currently there are 17 species that have only been identified in one of the Wellington squares. Of note are a Northern shoveler and a Cirl bunting.

Northern Shoveler, Hugh Robertson, 9th September, Otaki Water Treatment Plant. Male in near breeding plumage; white breast with some black speckling; white extending up onto the back. glossy green head, darker towards the forehead; small faint facial crescent visible in photos; larger white flank patch cf nearby Australasian Shovelers. Record submitted to BNZ's RAC

Cirl Bunting, Troy Makan. Wainuiomata Coast Road.

1 skulking male seen in shrubby area on lower hillslope. Showing classic black bib and line through the eye. With a 2nd bird likely a female but didn't get a good enough look to rule out a yellowhammer. Likely based on the behaviour though. Lots of yellowhammer for comparison in mixed flocks feeding in more open grassy areas

There are currently 10 squares within the Wellington region from which there are no checklists.

Species Rank

| Wellington | Spring Rank | % with data | Winter Rank | % with data | Total Rank** | % with data |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Chaffinch | 1 | 88.5 | 6 | 73.1 | 1 | 86.2 |
| Starling | 2 | 85.9 | 4 | 74.4 | 5 | 80.8 |
| Blackbird | 3 | 84.6 | 2 | 80.8 | 1 | 86.2 |
| Goldfinch | 4 | 80.8 | 15 | 56.4 | 8 | 75.5 |
| Welcome swallow | 5 | 80.8 | 8 | 71.8 | 4 | 84 |
| Magpie | 6 | 78.2 | 1 | 85.9 | 3 | 85.1 |
| House sparrow | 7 | 75.6 | 10 | 69.2 | 7 | 76.6 |
| Skylark | 8 | 71.8 | | | 14 | 66 |
| Paradise duck | 9 | 70.5 | 11 | 67.9 | 12 | 72.3 |
| Grey warbler | 10 | 69.2 | 8 | 71.8 | 8 | 75.5 |
| Harrier | 11 | 66.7 | 6 | 73.1 | 6 | 79.8 |
| Greenfinch | 12 | 65.4 | | | 19 | 60.6 |
| Song thrush | 13 | 65.4 | 12 | 66.7 | 12 | 72.3 |
| Yellowhammer | 14 | 64.1 | 13 | 61.5 | 14 | 66 |
| Spur-winged pl | 15 | 64.1 | 3 | 75.6 | 11 | 73.4 |
| Tui | 16 | 62.8 | 16 | 55.1 | 17 | 64.9 |
| Blackbacked gull | 17 | 62.8 | 14 | 60.2 | 20 | 59.6 |
| Fantail | 18 | 60.2 | 4 | 74.4 | 8 | 75.5 |
| Kingfisher | 19 | 60.2 | | | 18 | 61.7 |
| Bellbird | 20 | 56.4 | 16 | 55.1 | 14 | 66 |

** All records up to the 20th of December, 2019

East Harbour Banded Dotterels – Update

Since the last report in the September newsletter, monitoring of banded dotterels on the Eastbourne beach and the outlet of Lake Kohangapiripiri has continued. The news from the Eastbourne beach is bad as most of the nests have been predated by a domestic cat. The offending cat, a domestic tabby, has been photographed using a trail camera. Similar to last year predation of nests occurred at night. News of the predation of the nests on the Eastbourne beach has been publicised locally on social media as well as nationally (Stuff). A series of measures have been taken to try and stop the predation and include the use of a metal cage on nests. The metal cages were placed on 2 nests and chicks were hatched from both of them. The chicks did not appear to have survived. None of the measures have prevented ongoing predation and this season it is most likely that no banded dotterel chicks from the Eastbourne colony will fledge.

In marked contrast the majority of nests at the Lake Kohangapiripiri study site have been successful in producing chicks. Currently chicks at this site are now fledgling. There is an ongoing predator control programme at Lake Kohangapiripiri that includes control of a range of predators, including feral cats. Prior to effective predator control at this site hedgehogs were shown to be predated banded dotterel nests.

The picture taken in 2019 at Lake Kohangapiripiri is a fledgling banded dotterel with a characteristic absence of bands on its chest.



Photo, Dallas Bishop

Predation of banded dotterel nests by cats was also a major problem this year at South Bay, Kaikoura. In October this year, over a very short interval 16 of 18 shorebird chicks were predated and an additional couple of adults were missing and presumed dead (Stuff).

There is an urgent need to prevent predation of ground nesting birds such as banded dotterels.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/117263362/lone-tabby-on-its-way-to-wiping-out-second-generation-of-dotterels>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/401390/south-bay-banded-dotterel-chicks-nearly-wiped-out-by-cats>

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/the-weekend/audio/201829166/kaikora's-banded-dotterels>

Cats in Hutt City

Eastbourne beach is part of Hutt City and the council is aware of the problem of domestic cats predated banded dotterel nests in both the current and previous breeding season. In July this year Hutt City Council produced a discussion paper on the options for the control of cats in the city. The first section of the discussion paper, *“outlines what the current situation is with respect to the management of cats. The second section outlines options available to Council in relation to the management and control of cats and whether a specific bylaw relating to the control of cats is required.”*

Potential options listed for the control of cats included;

- Micro-chipping
- De-sexing
- The use of effective anti-predation devices
- Limiting the number of cats per property
- Cats inside or contained at night.

The discussion paper lists the examples of the Palmerston North and Wellington City councils that have passed by-laws relating to the control of cats. Both councils require cats to be micro-chipped and the Palmerston North bylaw also includes the requirement for a maximum of three cats per household without permit and cats over 6 months of age to be de-sexed unless registered for breeding.

In November Hutt City Council ran an on-line survey to get views from cat owners and non-cat owners on the five management options for the control of cats. Council will review the results of the survey and then decide what steps should be taken.

Effective control of cats to reduce and eventually eliminate predation of nests of birds by domestic cats will require significant changes in the behaviour of cat owners. A recent study by Wayne Linklater and colleagues (2019) carried out a survey of cat owners and veterinarians to prioritise behaviours that could lead to reduced predation of wildlife by cats. The paper provides information which councils and conservationists could use when considering measures to control cats.

Abstract: "Behavior prioritization is underutilized but critical to the success of conservation campaigns. It provides an understanding of the target audience's values, transcending conflict, and informing the design of achievable and effective advocacy campaigns. Depredation by domestic cats may depress wildlife populations, leading to conflict between cat owners and conservationists. We surveyed veterinarians and cat owners at veterinary clinics to prioritize a list of nine cat-management behaviors. Cat-owner behaviors were ranked by their (a) likelihood of implementation and (b) current adoption rate by cat owners, (c) perceived effectiveness at reducing predation on wildlife, and (d) veterinarians' opinions about their impact on cat welfare. Bringing cats in at night, from before dusk until after dawn, was revealed to be the behavior most suited to a campaign to reduce cats' hunting. Behaviors ranked as more effective for conservation (e.g., 24-hr cat confinement) were unlikely to be adopted by cat owners or not supported by veterinarians, whose expert and normative support may be critical to a campaign. Although more conservation-effective behaviors received a lower priority, we discuss the repeated use of behavior prioritization to achieve incremental reductions in cat depredation by engaging with cat owners." The full paper is available online – see below.

Position Paper concerning cats in Lower Hutt 2019.

http://infocouncil.huttcity.govt.nz/Open/2019/07/PRC_15072019_AGN_2629_AT.PDF

Wayne L. Linklater, Mark J. Farnworth, Yolanda van Heezik, Kevin J. Stafford, Edith A. MacDonald (2019) Prioritizing cat-owner behaviors for a campaign to reduce wildlife depredation, Conservation Science and Practice, (2019) 1: <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.29>, <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/csp2.29>

Banded dotterel, 4th Place Bird of the Year Competition

George Hobson was once again campaign manager for the banded dotterel in this year's competition. This was an outstanding result and the first time the banded dotterel has made the top ten. Left, Poster for the 2019 banded dotterel campaign.



Deformed beaks in sparrows – Avian keratin disorder re-visited

In a 2016 Wellington Newsletter there was a piece on deformed beaks in sparrows. Three of the four recorded cases in 2016 were from the Wellington region. In December this year we have had a sparrow with a deformed beak at our sugar water feeder. Apart from the deformed beak this bird appeared to be clinically normal.



“Avian keratin disorder (AKD) is an epizootic of debilitating beak deformities, first documented in black-capped chickadees (Poecile atricapillus) in Alaska during the late 1990s. Similar deformities have now been recorded in dozens of species of birds across multiple continents. ”

In 2016 evidence was presented to implicate a virus as a possible cause of deformed beaks in black-capped chickadees (Zylberberg et al., 2016). Further studies (Zylberberg 2018) has provided additional evidence for an association between avian keratin disorder and Poecivirus.

The cause of deformed beaks in New Zealand sparrows has not been determined.

Zylberberg M, Van Hemert C, Dumbacher JP, Handel CM, Tihan T, DeRisi JL. Novel Picornavirus Associated with Avian Keratin Disorder in Alaskan Birds. MBio. 2016 Jul 26;7(4). pii: e00874-16. doi: 10.1128/mBio.00874-16

Zylberberg M, Van Hemert C, Handel CM, DeRisi JL. (2018) **Avian keratin disorder** of Alaska black-capped chickadees is associated with Poecivirus infection. Virol J. 2018 Jun 15;15(1):100. doi: 10.1186/s12985-018-1008-5.

Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop

Back at work

Flint, a Jack Russell/Fox terrier cross and his handler, Richard Johnson were back at work on Matiu/Somes Island on the 6th of December when this photograph was taken. Flint is a rodent detection dog who recently spent two extra nights on Campbell Island after being spooked and separated from his owner. The dog had to be left on the island as the support vessel, HMS Canterbury had to return to mainland New Zealand. A rescue mission was organised and a Heli Otago helicopter flew 660km to Campbell Island to find Flint. Fortunately, Flint had made his way back to Beeman base on Campbell Island and was quickly found by his rescuers.



Rodent detector dogs, including Flint are routinely used to check the predator-free status of Kapiti, Mana and Matiu/Somes Islands. The rodent dogs complement other measures such as tracking tunnels which are used as part of an ongoing programme to ensure these islands are pest-free.

Bird's Nest Soup

On a recent holiday we visited Kumai in Kalimantan in Borneo. The two main industries in Kumai are palm oil and edible bird's nests. The skyline of Kumai is dotted with stark concrete buildings (photo) with no windows and slits for the entry of edible nest swiftlets. Loud playback calls are broadcast for 18 hours a day to attract the birds and encourage them to nest. Previously playback calls were broadcast for 24 hours a day but this situation was changed in response to protests from the locals.



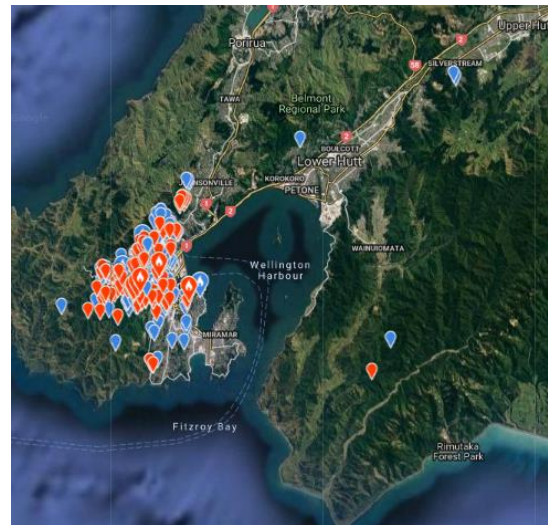
The edible nests are principally made from the saliva of the birds. They are carefully cleaned with removal of the feathers prior to sale. The nests sell for ~\$2500 making them one of the world's most expensive foods. Traditionally the bird's nests were harvested from natural, limestone caves. Conversion of forests to palm oil and the overharvesting of nests

has resulted in more than a 90% decline in the Niah Caves in Sarawak, Borneo.

Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop

Rare sighting of Kaka in Remutaka Forest Park

There has been a recent report in the local press of a pair of kaka being observed by trappers near Mount McKerrow in the Remutaka forest park. The Remutaka Conservation trust have an extensive predator control programme in this area which has enabled the continuous growth in the recently established brown kiwi population. The hope is that the predator control will be sufficient to allow Kaka to establish a breeding population. The source of the Kaka was unknown and could be either Zealandia in Wellington city or the southern Taranaki range. If you happen to see a kaka in the Wellington region look for bands as many of the Zealandia birds were banded as chicks.



The attached map is the kaka records from the Atlas records in the southern Wellington region, with a large number of records associated with Zealandia. There are two recent observations of kaka from the Remutaka park, one was on the 9th of November, 2019 on the Clay Ridge track by Danielle Shanahan and the other on the 13th of November, 2019 on the Orongorongo track by Raewyn Empson. These observations are not far from Mount McKerrow as the kaka flies.

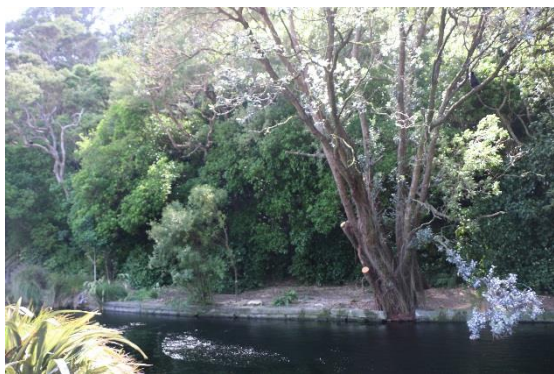
Historical information of birds in the Remutaka Forest Park are documented by Bob Brockie in his book, A Living New Zealand Forest, 1992. Detailed records of birds in the Remutaka Park were recorded over a 25 year period during the study (1966-1990) by DSIR scientists. During this period there was only one observation in the Remutaka Forest Park – a kaka was seen being chased by a falcon.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/117860239/rare-kk-sighting-in-remutaka-forest-park-brings-hope>

Williams Park, Days Bay Little Shag Nesting Colony

Following a complaint from the Days Bay Residents Association about the smell of the nesting little shag colony Hutt City Council organised for the nesting trees to be removed. This operation in early December was halted when Sally Bain complained to the Hutt City Council pointing out that the trees contained active nests. However, at least two of the trees used for nesting had been removed and at least one “nesting tree” remains.

The nesting colony at Williams Park is the largest colony of little shags associated with Wellington Harbour. In October, 2014 there were ~20 little shag nests at the colony which has increased since then. There are no houses close to the colony apart from the cottage associated with the park. The building at Williams Park is the Days Bay Pavillion (Picture above).



Picture, post tree felling and “trimming”.

“Department of Conservation operations manager Jack Mace said he was “very disappointed” by the council’s action.

“Shags are part of New Zealand’s unique natural heritage and are protected under the Wildlife Act. The fact they’re making their homes alongside our own is something to celebrate.”

He has asked the council to stop work until it had discussed the situation with DoC staff.” Stuff.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/117926694/call-to-prosecute-hutt-city-council-trees-used-by-nesting-shags-cut-down>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/117906061/nesting-birds-lose-their-home-after-eastbourne-residents-object-to-smell>

Protection status for Little Shags

There is a long history of persecution of shags in New Zealand and their protection status has been summarised by Miskelly (2014).

“The little shag and pied shag were included in the Third Schedule on the Wildlife Act 1953 (able to be hunted or killed subject to Minister’s notification), and black shag was not protected. Black shag was moved to the Second Schedule (partially protected) in 1986, and to the Third Schedule (with little and pied shags) in 2010. The circumstances under which black shags and little shags may be killed is covered by the Wildlife (Black Shag and Little Shag) Notice 2012.”

[Miskelly, C.M. 2014. Legal protection of New Zealand’s indigenous terrestrial fauna – an historical review. *Tuhinga* 25: 25–101.](#)